

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9929

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

USLO PEKING

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

COMUSSAG NKP THAI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 5248

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, CB

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF NEW KHMER CABINET

REF: PHNOM PENH 5209

1. SUMMARY AND COMMENT: THE NEW GKR CABINET HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF INTENSE POLITICAL INFIGHTING BY COMPETING ELEMENTS WITHIN THE RULING SOCIOREPUBLICAN PARTY. THEREFORE, THE CABINET, NOT SURPRISINGLY, PRESENTS LITTLE NEW OR STARTLING IN EITHER PERSONALITIES OR LEVEL OF COMPETENCE. THERE
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IS NO POLITCAL PARTY PARTICIPATION OTHER THAN THAT

OF SOCIO-REPUBLICAN ELEMENTS, THERE ARE ONLY TWO INDEPENDENTS, AND JUST ONE GENERAL.

2. THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY NOT THE CABINET WHICH PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET WOULD HAVE PREFERRED, BUT REFLECTS THE COMPROMISES FORCED ON HIM BY THE VARIOUS POLITICAL FACTIONS OF HIS PARTY AND PERHAPS BY THE MARSHAL HIMSELF. PRESIDENT LON NOL'S CONTROVERSIAL YOUNGER BROTHER, LON NON, HAS SUCCEEDED IN PLACING SEVERAL OF HIS SUPPORTERS IN THE CABINET, BUT IN UNIMPORTANT POSITIONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE INFORMATION PORTFOLIO. THE ANTI-LON NON FACTION WITHIN THE PARTY, HEADED BY HANG THUN HAK AND PAN SOTHI, HAS AT THE SAME TIME IMPROVED ITS POSITION.

3. THE NEW CABINET HAS A NUMBER OF COMPETENT PEOPLE IN IT, MANY OF WHOM ARE HOLDOVERS. THE NAMING OF FANK CHIEF OF STAFF SAK SUTSAKHAN TO HOLD CONCURRENTLY THE POST OF DEFENSE MINISTER IS ALSO A PLUS SINCE IT, HOPEFULLY, WILL RESULT IN A DEGREE OF MILITARY ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE GOVERNMENT WHICH WAS COMPLETELY LACKING UNDER FANK COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ. ON THE DEBIT SIDE, THE TWO KHMER KROM MINISTERS IN THE PREVIOUS CABINET HAVE BEEN DROPPED, WHICH IS REGRETTABLE IN VIEW OF THE HEAVY MILITARY BURDEN BORNE BY KHMER KROM TROOPS AND KHMER KROM SENSITIVITY TO POLITICAL SLIGHTS OF THIS NATURE. THE REPLACEMENT OF THE PREVIOUS MINISTER OF HEALTH BY AN UTTER INCOMPETENT IS ALSO A STEP BACKWARD. MORE FUNDAMENTALLY, HOWEVER, THE NEW CABINET IS UNLIKELY EITHER TO ATTRACT POPULAR CONFIDENCE OR TO BE REGARDED AS A PRELIMINARY TO NEGOTIATIONS. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

4. THE DEPARTMENT ALREADY POSSESSES BIOGRAPHIC DATA ON THE HOLDOVERS FROM THE PREVIOUS CABINET, I.E. LONG BORET, PAN SOTHI, HOU HONG, KHY TAING LIM, KEUKY LIM, KORN ORN, LOEUNG NAL, IV YANG, AND CHEAVY SEANG LEAN. WE HAVE ALSO RECENTLY SUBMITTED BIOGRAPHIC DATA ON THE NEW MINISTER OF DEFENSE, SAK SUTSAKHAN.

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5. HAPPILY, MINISTER OF INTERIOR MAJOR GENERAL EK PROEUNG, WHOSE REPUTATION FOR CORRUPTION MADE HIM A CLEAR LIABILITY, HAS BEEN DROPPED. FORMER MINISTER OF INFORMATION, CHHANG SONG, ALSO LOST HIS JOB. ALTHOUGH NOT PARTICULARLY STRONG, HE WAS HARD-WORKING AND CONSCIENTIOUS. HE WAS CLOSE TO LONG BORET AND SPOKE ENGLISH WELL, AN ADVANTAGE IN DEALING WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS THE NEW MINISTER DOES NOT POSSESS.

WE ARE DISAPPOINTED AT THE DEPARTURES OF MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL ACTION, THACH TOAN, AND MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH, KIM VIEN. BOTH ARE YOUNG, ENERGETIC AND FAIRLY COMPETENT. MOREOVER, THEY WERE THE ONLY TWO KHMER KROM IN THE PREVIOUS CABINET; THERE ARE NONE IN THE NEW ONE. THE KHMER KROM (I.E. KHMER BORN IN SOUTH VIETNAM) ARE HIGHLY SENSITIVE TO WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE A LONG-STANDING PRACTICE OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THEM, PARTICULARLY SINCE THEY CLAIM, WITH JUSTIFICATION, THAT KHMER KROM SOLDIERS CARRY MORE THAN THEIR SHARE OF THE BURDEN ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

6. NEW CABINET MEMBERS ARE : (A) HANG THUN HAK--ALTHOUGH NOT DECISIVE, HAK IS A MAN OF STATURE AND IS RESPECTED. HE IS A FORMER PRIME MINISTER AND HEADS THE ANTI-LON NON FACTION WITHIN THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY. HE HAS A REPUTATION AS A MAN WITH ACCESS TO THE OTHER SIDE (THE KC). AFTER HE CEASED BEING PRIME MINISTER, THE OTHER SIDE DROPPED HIS NAME SOME TIME AGO FROM THEIR LIST OF GKR "TRAITORS". HE HAS UNDERTAKEN VARIOUS SPECIAL MISSIONS FOR PRESIDENT NON NOL TO ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT HIS ALLEDGED CONTACTS BUT HAS NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

(B) HEM KETH SANA--AN "OLDER STATESMAN" OF NO PARTICULAR NOTE WHO PARTICIPATED IN SEVERAL PREVIOUS CABINETS BEFORE LONG BORET BECAME PRIME MINISTER. HE IS CONSIDERED TO BE CLOSE TO THE MARSHAL.

(C) KEAM RETH-- A MEMBER OF THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE ASSOCIATED WITH THE HANG THUN HAK-PAN SOTHI GROUP. HE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE FIVE-MAN PARTY POLITBURO WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED RECENTLY TO GUIDE PARTY POLICIES.

(D) LONG BOTTA--BOTTA IS ANOTHER HANG THUN HAKIST
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ON THE SOCIO-REPUBLICAN PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE, AND IS A MEMBER OF ITS POLITBURO AS WELL. MOST RECENTLY, HE WAS DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF YOUTH AND SPORTS. HE IS YOUNG AND ENERGETIC, BUT HIS COMPETENCE AND INTELLIGENCE ARE A MATTER OF SOME DISPUTE. HE CLAIMS TO HAVE GOOD TIES WITH YOUNG INTELLECTUALS AND TECHNOCRATS.

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(E) THONG LIM HUONG--HUONG IS ENERGETIC, INTELIIGENT, AMBITIOUS AND ONE OF LON NON'S CHIEF LIEUTENANTS. HIS APPOINT AS MINISTER OF INFORMATION IS THE MAJOR TRIUMPH IN THIS CABINET FOR THE "PETIT FRERE" WHO, OTHERWISE, DOES NOT HAVE MUCH TO CHEER ABOUT. HUONG IS EXPERIENCED IN INFORMATION MATTERS,HAVING BEEN UNDERSECRETARY IN THE MINISTRY DURING THE PAST SEVERAL CABINETS, BUT DOES NOT SPEAK ENGLISH, WHICH WILL HAMPER HIM WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS.

(F) VAR SAR--IS PRESENTLY HEAD OF THE NATIONAL POLICE AND WAS UNDERSECRETARY FOR NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE PREVIOUS CABINET. HE IS WELL REGARDED. HE HAS SOME
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TIES WITH MEMBERS OF THE HANG THUN HAK-PAN SOTHI GROUP.

(G) NGUON CHEAN-- A NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEPUTY, WHO

CLIMBED ON THE LON NON BANDWAGON AFTER THE LATTER'S RETURN FROM ABROAD LAST YEAR. WE KNOW LITTLE ELSE ABOUT HIM.

(H) UNG SIKHUN--UNG SIHHUN IS ONE OF LON NON'S MOST VISIBLE SUPPORTERS AND HAS ACTED AS HIS LINK TO THE FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY. HE IS A PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR AND IS POWERFUL IN MUNICIPAL PHNOM PENH POLITICS. LIKE MANY MEMBERS OF LON NON'S ENTOURAGE, UNG SIKHUN IS CONSIDERED BY OTHER POLITICIANS AS UNSCRUPULOUS, UN-TRUSTWORTH, AND CORRUPT. HE IS ALSO, HOWEVER, INTELLIGENT AND ENERGETIC. THE FACT THAT HE AND NGUON CHEAN ARE ONLY SECRETARIES OF STATE, LOW ON THE PROTOCOL PECKING ORDER COMPARED TO THE OTHER CABINET MEMBERS, IS ANOTHER INDICATION THAT LON NON DID NOT GET NEARLY AS MUCH AS HE WOULD HAVE HOPED IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT.

(I) SAING SARATH--SARATH IS AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY TO US. WE UNDERSTAND HE IS A YOUNG DOCTOR OF SCIENCE IN ECONOMICS, RECENTLY RETURNED FROM FRANCE. WE DO NOT KNOW HIS POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS, IF ANY, BUT BELIEVE HE TOO MAY BE ALLIED WITH THE HANG THUN HAK-PAN SOTHI-BOTTA GROUP WHICH CLAIMS IT IS TRYING TO ATTRACT YOUNG INTELLECTUALS.

7. IT COMES AS NO SURPRISE TO SEE THAT SIRIK MATAK'S REPUBLICANS ARE NOT REPRESENTED IN THE CABINET, NOR ARE OTHER POLITICAL GROUPINGS. LEOUNG NAL AND LY KVANG PANN ARE THE ONLY "INDEPENDTS." PANN IS NOT A FACTOR ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, AND LOEUNG NAL IS GENERALLY REGARDED AS INCOMPETENT, WHICH MAKES IT REGRETTABLE THAT HE WAS GIVEN PUBLIC HEALTH, A DEMANDING PORTOFOLIO AT THIS TIME.

8. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO FLESH OUT ABOVE BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARIES. EMBASSY BIOGRAPHIC FILES HAVE BEEN TEMPORARILY SENT TO BANGKOK.
DEAN

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